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THE TWO FAITHS

BY

JAMES O. MURRAY, D.D.

DEAN OF PRINCETON COLLEGE

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Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.

JOHN xx. 29.

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OF the personal history of the twelve apostles we know but little. Like the prophets, their personality seems sunk out of sight, and their great office only looms up to view. Judas, the traitor, is known by his crime. Peter and John are better known than any of the rest. They figure largely in the subsequent history of the church, and they have left writings. But what shall be said of the rest? We have their names; in a few instances we have passing allusions in the gospels, which give a glimpse of their personal characteris-

tics. For a few, some dim, uncertain traditions cast doubtful light on their career. It is at best a scanty record of men who, taught and inspired by their Great Master, wrought the greatest moral revolution known to history. Reticence is indeed a distinguishing feature of Revelation. The silences of Scripture are most significant; like the silence of Christ at the bar of Pilate, they carry a profound spiritual lesson. In the case before us, the reason for reticence may not be far to seek. The object of the gospels is to unfold the divine personality of our Lord and Saviour. The evangelists with one accord obey this principle. Nothing in their narrative distracts attention from the central object; no intervening characters come between us and the Supreme Blessed Vision.

Still we cannot repress the desire to know all that can be gathered up from incidental allusions or concluded by wise inference, that pertains to the personal history of the twelve. Some years since Brycnnius, Metropolitan Bishop of Constantinople, discovered the tractate known as the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," "the most important discovery of modern times,"[1] in connection with which more than a hundred treatises have been written. Should some future discovery throw light on the career of any apostle, it would be hailed with a kindred joy.

I propose in this discourse to set forth what can be known of the apostle Thomas. Apart from any general considerations of interest in his career as an apostle, he is of special interest to us in this time of

[1] Harnack.

unsettled beliefs, as a man who came to full and assured faith in Jesus Christ against opposing tendencies of mental constitution and habit. He is familiarly called *the doubter* among the apostles, and in the Book of Common Prayer the collect for Saint Thomas Day addresses God as "having for the more confirmation of the faith suffered His holy apostle Thomas to be doubtful in His Son's Resurrection."

It sometimes happens that a few brief incidents in life may reveal character more fully than years of routine existence. The whole Judas comes out in the snarling exclamation over the anointing at Bethany, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" An entire side of Peter's character is seen in his rebuke of

Christ, when he said, "That be far from Thee, Lord." Of such incidents there are three in the story of Thomas, each strongly characteristic of the man. To these let us turn.

I.

Jesus had withdrawn from Jerusalem into the solitudes beyond Jordan, the place where John at first baptized. That seclusion was sought by Him just before He entered on the final scenes of His ministry. Thence He had been summoned by a message to Bethany, where His friend Lazarus, His dearest friend outside the immediate circle of the apostleship, was sick. To obey the summons was to face death at the hands of His enemies. "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest Thou

thither again?" is the alarmed remonstrance from His disciples, as He announced His purpose of going to that sorrow-smitten home. It was no shadowy peril which strong nerves could despise. The disciples knew well the fast-rising storm of rage and hate against the Master. It seemed to them, it could in fact, have worn no other aspect, this purpose of His, than a voluntary exposure to a sudden and violent end. That meant the extinction of all their hopes, the overthrow of the Messianic plans, which in their gracious compass and divine meaning were daily becoming more clear to them all. Why not linger beyond the Jordan, till the rage so recently roused had spent its fury? It was no waste of His holy works, for many came to Him even in that seclusion, and believed on Him there.

But all in vain their expostulation. When was appeal to the heart of Christ ever unanswered? Unshaken by their remonstrances, He calmly adhered to His purpose, and set His face toward what, to Him, seemed the duty of the hour, to them, a journey to swift and untimely death. It is Thomas now who speaks. "The Master must not go alone. Let us also go that we may die with Him." The words spring to his lips from inner depths of his soul. They reveal his character. John is silent, and Peter and James. We may well imagine a momentary hush of disappointed pleading, as Christ's final words fell upon the little group, "Nevertheless, let us go unto him." The words of Thomas, "Let us also go that we may die with Him," break the silence, and they follow the Lord

over the path of peril. What do these words signify of his character? From what do they spring? First of all, they signify what loyal, deep-rooted affection for the Lord centred in his soul. The temperament of this doubter was no cold, phlegmatic spirit, incapable of lofty, self-sacrificing devotion. He cannot live apart from the Master. He will go to shield the beloved Teacher, if he can. If not, then he will die with Him, content in this supreme devotion to his Lord. If they "cannot save Him, they can at least share His fate." If the words of Thomas mean no more, they at least signify that no heart among the twelve beat with a more manly, loyal, sincere affection for Christ than his. But they *do* have another, and in some respects a more characteristic significance. They

mark a nature prone to despondency, apt to take the darkest view of things. It is the language of despair and vanished hope. Hear Christ's noble words — dense indeed they are with loftiest ideals of duty. "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth because there is no light in him" — words which, as applied to this case, must mean, "following the will of God, which leads Me into Judea again, I am walking in the light. I cannot stumble, whatever may befall Me there;" words never to be forgotten by us when called to face a solemn duty, involving personal risk, exposure, death it may be, — these words kindle no serene and steadfast hope in the soul of Thomas.

He sees no light. The temperament of doubt lies hard by that of despair. It may consort with a heart of most loyal affection, but this will not guard it from the bitterness of despondency and the paralysis of gloom.

II.

The next scene in the life of Thomas has about it a still more engrossing interest. Christ had been at Bethany and had brought into that home an unspeakable joy. He had emerged safely from contact with the Jews. Thomas had seen His word verified that He should not stumble, since the light He followed shone from above. The path of duty had been the path of perfect safety. A few weeks pass, and the gathered storm was about to burst. The Jew-

ish enmity against Him came to its head by reason of that visit to Bethany. From that day forth, they, the chief priests and the Pharisees, took counsel that they might put Him to death. The end draws nigh; the traitor has made his bargain; the money has been paid, and He, the Victim, will be delivered up; the last Passover has been kept; the last Supper has been instituted; the last words only remain to be spoken. The eleven disciples are with Him in the little upper room, as the evening shadows begin to fall. The traitor has gone out. Christ sees in their faces the pain of the anticipated separation. He reads in their countenances the dismay under the gloom of which the light of hope was dying out fast. So His words must be words of inspiration

and good cheer, hopeful words, uplifting words, ringing words. They were spoken, and He told them of the Father's House, many mansioned; of the place He was going to prepare for them; of their final re-union and co-dwelling. It was a wonderful outburst of glowing revelation, of inspiring prophecy, of eternal promise, ending with the words, "And whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know." The response comes from Thomas, — and what a response! It is an utterance of despondency; it seems to take the very life out of Christ's glowing assurances; it seems to sound a knell to hopes which those assurances had begun to kindle. "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" Not know whither Christ was going? Not know the way?

But was such ignorance possible? That He was going away from them to be once more with His Father, that the way for them was simply to follow Him, — surely all this had been taught them of Christ, and Thomas had known it. What then is the secret of his word, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The mood is that of the man who can walk only by sight. His despondent temperament has been busy breeding doubts. If Christ could have indicated to him the Father's House, so that he could see it, as he saw with his bodily eye the temple on the summit of Mount Zion, if Christ could only point out the way to that Heavenly Home, so that he could see it as he could see the way wind from the city over the mountain to the home at Bethany,

then his soul would be at rest. The hour, the surroundings, the Master Himself demand faith, and Thomas, in his despondency, asks that *sight* may take the place of faith. In short, he has sunk into that mood which in the third scene of his life brings him to his extremity of spiritual life, which is God's opportunity for his final recovery.

III.

The scene just described occurred on Thursday evening; the betrayal, arrest, condemnation, crucifixion, and entombment that night and the day following; the resurrection on the Sunday morning. The disciples, all but Thomas, were there together, Why was he absent? It is evident that his faith had received a shock.

All seemed dark to him. Christ had been crucified. Thomas had evidently seen Him hanging on the cross, pierced also by the spear of the Roman soldier. He knew of His burial at the hands of Joseph of Arimathea. No outward sign of any victory had been seen by him. He was walking by sight. And so he went about the streets, restless, moody, despondent, — yet with a true affection for that crucified Master all the while asserting its power over him. Doubtless he felt that he could gain no help from the other disciples. He was not with them. Such a soul is solitary, bears its burdens in solitude, flees from human intercourse, broods and broods and broods over its own troubles. In this mood he is most probably found on the day following that first interview with Christ

by the other disciples. It is easy to *reconstruct* the meeting. We can readily suppose John to have said, "Ah! Thomas, why were you not with us last night?" "I was not with you, fellow disciple, because I could see no good in such an assemblage. Our strong staff is broken and our beautiful rod. The Hope of Israel is slain, and we shall see Him no more." "Ah, but you could not say that had you been present with us; for the Master came and manifested Himself to us, gave us His salutation of Peace, breathed on us that Holy Ghost of which you remember He spoke to us so gloriously in His last talks around the table just before He was arrested. Nay, He showed us His hands and His side." "*Showed* you His hands and His side! Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my hand

into His side, I will not believe." Can Thomas not then trust the testimony of his fellow disciples? Must there be an evidence more direct than this before his old faith in Jesus will resume its power? It seems so; and it is this point in his history which Thorwaldsen, the sculptor, seized when he carved that statue of Thomas in the church at Copenhagen, with the measuring-rule in his hand. So passes over his head another week of restless doubt. What a week it must have been in his life! The days come and go, but bring him no further proof to satisfy his tossing soul. What will be his fate, — to doubt on, to live in this blank, hopeless uncertainty; or to go back to his old Judaism, confessing himself the dupe of his own imagination regarding one whom he once thought

to be the Messiah? But when the disciples are again together, Thomas is with them. It has been noticed by scholars that Saint John never speaks of Thomas save to add his other name, "Didymus." It is impossible to think that the Evangelist translates the word for the mere purpose of mentioning that Thomas had a Greek as well as an Aramaic name. The man appears in the name. He had a double nature. Side by side with this true and deep love for the person of his Lord, was this obstinate, unyielding tendency to doubt. Obeying the last, he had laid down his strange test; obeying the first he had again joined himself to the little band of Christ's followers. Then occurs that wonderful scene. Picture it! The eleven disciples gathered at nightfall in some obscure dwelling, the

doors shut, a hush on the group, or the talk carried on in half whispers, when, lo! once again unannounced, suddenly the Lord appears gives the old salutation; and then, oh then! he singles out one from that awe-stricken group. "Thomas, reach hither thy finger and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and put it into My side, and be not faithless, but believing." Did Thomas accept the condescending, patient invitation? Did he, could he touch that wounded side, those scarred hands? Nothing leads us to think that he did. His last vestige of doubt has vanished. Instead of this verifying touch, instead of this physical contact, we have the burning confession of his believing, adoring soul, — It is, it is my Lord and my God! A confession of his faith not simply in His resurrec-

tion but in Him whom he sees before him in all the Divinity both of His Person and of His work.

IV.

We may learn some wholesome lessons from this life. *First of all, that faith may be endangered by false tests.* Evidently God does not want from man blind, unreasoning obedience. His service is to be a reasonable service, to quote Saint Paul's phrase. Nor does Christ seek from man credulity, but insists rather on intelligence in the exercise of faith. Superstition counts for nothing in the gospel, as a spiritual value. But in the record of the gospels twice we find apostles putting their faith to the strain of false tests. When Peter would fain walk on the water to come

to Christ he was substituting a religion of romance for one of reality, was *trying* his faith by abnormal standards; when Thomas substituted the evidence of eyesight and touch for what should have satisfied him, the evidence of testimony, the witness of his brethren, he was running a terrible risk. Suppose Christ had refused to submit to such prying, and had said, "If he will not believe without seeing, then he must take his chosen course." Would this have been unjust in the Master? Oh, no! not unjust; it could be amply justified. But the Lord in His patience and condescension did that for Thomas which saved him; and yet mark the significant word, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Under that benediction this apostle could not be sheltered. Yes, *we* may be tempted

sometimes to insist on a kind of evidence for the truth of religion which is not a legitimate demand; and because we do not find it, be tempted to fling up our belief in the truth of this gospel. *We* may be tempted sometimes to insist on a degree of evidence beyond what God has been pleased to furnish, and beyond what has satisfied thousands of earth's clearest minds and purest hearts. We may subject our faith to the strain of false tests. Every man does who insists that all difficulties in the way of belief shall be cleared up, before he will act on what light he has. He stands just where Thomas stood when he said, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." With this

difference, Christ for exceptional reasons complied with Thomas' hard demand. It was a marvel of patient love, and consideration for a great weakness. But now, faith which courts and insists upon false tests must run the terrible risk of finding them unmet. No one will rise from the dead, no voice will peal from the opening heavens to assure us that Christ is the Son of God. It has been done once, sufficiently and for all time.

Again, it should strengthen our faith that disciples like Thomas so often emerge triumphantly from a conflict of doubt into a clearer and stronger believing. Assuredly the Church of England is right when in her beautiful collect God is worshipped as "having for the more confirmation of the faith suffered His

holy apostle Thomas to be doubtful in His Son's resurrection." Is it not a help to us to know that among the apostles was one whose natural sceptical tendency asserted itself, satisfied itself, and finally gave place to a belief as deep and intelligent as it was rapturous and controlling? Could what was not genuine have been palmed off on him by any possibility? We catch one glimpse more of Thomas, before he fades into the mists of tradition regarding his life and labors. We see him with the disciples at Jerusalem waiting for the descent of the Spirit. No more doubt, no more wavering! He has verified for himself beyond all possibility of doubt the truth of the gospel, and so also has verified it for us. Christianity has been sifted alike by its friends and by its foes. The records

of Christian biography reveal many a conflict of faith, through which the soul pressed onward to surer footing and a larger vision beyond. Thomas is but one of a class. Let us beware of judging them too harshly. Let us remember rather how Christ, after all, loved and prized this disciple. The group of the apostleship would seem very incomplete without him. Amid all his struggle, under all his doubt, he was sound at the core. His love for the Master was a steady and true affection throughout. That saved him, because he could not wholly disbelieve so long as he loved so deeply. The exquisite lines of Keble on Saint Thomas Day are full of meaning here: —

> We were not by when Jesus came,
> But round us far and near
> We see His trophies, and His name
> In choral echoes hear.

In a fair ground our lot is cast
As in the solemn week that pass'd
While some might doubt, but all adored,
Ere the whole widow'd Church had seen her risen Lord.

Is there, on earth, a spirit frail
Who fears to take their word,
Scarce daring, through the twilight pale,
To think he sees the Lord?
With eyes too tremblingly awake
To bear with dimness for His sake?
Read and confess the Hand Divine
That drew thy likeness here so true in every line.

For all thy rankling doubts so sore
Love thou thy Saviour still,
Him for thy Lord and God adore
And ever do His will.
Though vexing thoughts may seem to last,
Let not thy soul be quite o'ercast, —
Soon will He show thee all His wounds, and say,
"Long have I known thy name — know thou my face alway."

Finally, we cannot fail to note how this experience in the life of Thomas gives point and power to Christ's new beatitude; for if He gives a

new commandment, He gives also a new beatitude, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Yet the blessing comes straight upon an allusion to the faith of Thomas resting upon its basis of sight, — "Thomas because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." It is sometimes our dream, that if Christ were only upon earth, and we could go to Him and tell Him what are our struggles, and see His face and hear His voice or feel His uplifting hand, difficulties would vanish, our hearts would be anchored forever in unbroken certitude, and our loyalty to Christ would flame out into undying sacrifice for Him. Possibly we know not what manner of spirit we are of. Possibly we might find far greater disadvan-

tages to faithful life and service, then, than now. Assuredly Christ spoke truth when He pronounced a blessing on those who not having seen, yet have believed; whose faith does not rest upon outward evidence, but upon spiritual apprehension of that to which testimony is borne, of that which the Lord is in Himself, as the embodiment of the Divine. "The more we penetrate through the outward to the inward, through the flesh to the Spirit, through communion with the earthly to communion with the heavenly Lord, the more do we learn to know the fulness that is in Him, in whom dwelleth 'all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,' and in whom we are complete."

When that painful summons to his sudden death smote Dr. Arnold on a Sunday morning, his wife, we

are told, observed him "lying still but with his hands clasped, his lips moving, and his eyes raised, as if engaged in prayer, when suddenly he repeated firmly and earnestly, 'And Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.'"

To Dr. Arnold the character of Thomas had been always of deep interest. There were points of sympathy between the apostle of the first and the distinguished educator of the nineteenth century. Both had their struggles and their victories. But it was this last beatitude of Jesus which shed its holy and blessed light over that dying bed and into those dying eyes.

THE END.